

# Prosiding

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**Submission date:** 06-Feb-2019 01:18PM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 1073825976

**File name:** Prosiding\_Alimin.docx (39.88K)

**Word count:** 4885

**Character count:** 28438

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**THE INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD  
THEIR OWN ENGLISH ACCENT**

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**Abstract**

English as an International language (EIL) perceives different L1-accented English equally because intelligibility, clearly delivered messages, is the main concern in a conversation rather than native-likeness accent style. Thus, Indonesian EFL (English as a foreign language) learners should focus their English learning on intelligibility over native-likeness preference in the pedagogical setting. Nevertheless, whether or not the students focus their English learning on intelligibility still unidentifiable as yet. To know which aspects EFL learners focus on, the research investigated Indonesian EFL students' goal when communication in English. The goal is to raise their awareness about the important of intelligibility in an English communication. Also, EFL teachers are expected to highlight the intelligibility in classroom instruction. Thus, the targeted learning outcomes, particularly speaking skills, are reachable so the students' learning motivation will be enhanced. The study involved 36 university students. They were from University of Muhammadiyah Malang, East Java. The instruments to collect the data were questionnaire. Eventually, based on the analyzed data, the researcher found that EFL learners expected to be able to talk like a native when talking. It means they have negative attitudes toward their L1-accented English. It could be affected by low linguistic awareness, English exposure dominated by native speakers and the UK or US designed books for classroom learning. Data analysis outcomes will be discussed to incorporate the study outcomes with pedagogical instruction so that the outcomes will be applicable to classroom instruction.

**Keywords**

Intelligibility, perception, accent, and EIL.

**1. Introduction**

As English as foreign language learners (EFL) learners, the country of origin is easily identifiable through our English spoken style, commonly called an accent. In fact, that is not completely surprising as different accents are more likely affected by our country and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, (Montgomery, 2008) highlighted an accent is as a whole pronunciation patterns owned by a certain community (or country).

Having an L1-(first language) accented English, which is an English accent highly affected by a mother tongue, is believed by some EFL learners create a conversation barrier. However, it was proven untrue (see Crismore, Ngeow, & Soo, 1996). In other words, Intelligibility has nothing to do with any form of L1-accented English. In fact, being intelligible is more crucial to create more natural conversation rather than imitate British or American accents. Intelligibility is able to identify utterances (McKay, 2002).

Most tertiary institutions in Indonesia are aware about the key role of English in the global community. So, they obligate their students to deepen their English skills in their first year although as (Hamied, 2012) highlighted they have studied English from fourth grade in elementary schools until senior high schools. The final goal is

the students are capable of entering global business and accessing a wide range of information through the Internet. Unfortunately, Most EFL instructions emphasize heavily on theoretical aspects, such as grammar, vocabulary development, syntax etc. Most educational institutions hardly touch how English is used in real world. For example, Indonesians talk about business with Singaporeans or they go to China to present and market some local product.

Due to EFL pedagogical implementation, particularly in higher education, mostly focusing on narrow learning aspects, the university students in Indonesia believed having British and American accents is the goal in English speaking skills. That is English learning fallacy as in real English conversation, intelligibility is the key role for the success of conversation.

## **2.1 The use of English worldwide**

English use is a must to communicate with foreigners from overseas. They could possibly use

English as second language (L2) or EFL. In fact, there are two fundamentals factors driving English as EIL. They are economic and ICT development.

### **a. Economic development and English**

English and transnational Economic passion are like a two-sided coin. So, non-native speakers who would like to expand their business and market internationally must be able to speak fluent English. Otherwise, international business expansion is unlikely to achieve. Warschauer (2000) highlighted English has played the main role as a bridge for global communication in the science and economic aspects in the past few decades. Thus, it is clear that English is the key to access international market. This is reasonably acceptable that economic triggers play a crucial role toward the spread of English globally.

### **b. ICT development and English**

Baker& Jones (1998) claimed online information on the Internet is mostly in English. It is undeniable true that every aspect of our lives now depends heavily on the Internet, such as communication (Email and WA) social medias (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), reading online news, YouTube and online shopping. This condition leads people to indirectly get exposed by English without any intention from English speaking countries to spread their language. Wu, L., & Ben-Canaan (2006) claimed English has already also been dominating the Internet in the field of politic, economy and science. Due to the English dominant role in those three crucial fields, it become realistic why English is widely used as international language.

Nowadays, more people learn English because they are motivated to absorb as much as information provided by the Internet. The Internet is so beneficial to ease every single aspect of our life (Wu, L., & Ben-Canaan, 2006). For instance, the Internet makes English learning much easier by accessing the materials through it. Again, English expands its hegemony through ICT.

## **2.2 The use of English as EIL**

When discussing about EIL, one of the concern is the English speaking variations. Specifically, different EFL speakers have different English accents. Their English accents are highly affected by their L1 accent (see the chapter 1 on the accent definition). Additionally, the accent "refers to not only to the articulation of individual sounds, or *segmental*, but to *suprasegmental* features as well: intonation, rhythm, pitch, segmental length, tempo, and loudness" (Moyer, 2013, p. 10).

More importantly, our mother-tongueaccented English represents our true identity, our cultural background and country of origin, so

keeping our accent means keeping our identity. That is truly wonderful as people can easily recognize our nationality through our accent. For example, through listening someone talking with an Chinese accent, we can directly identify that he is from India. That is unique because English is not only a means of global communication but it also show the speaker' origin. When the language users talk in English, they are not only delivering the message to the listeners but they also let their listeners recognize who they are and how they are closely engaged into a global community (Norton, 1997). In the EIL context, every single different accent, such as Indian, Singaporean, Chinese and Indonesian accents, is warmly embraced as a part of the English speaking variety.

Nevertheless, some contend different accents lead into confusion in a conversation. In fact, it will not occur as long as the key requirement, intelligibility, is present in the conversation. In other words, intelligibility has to be emphasized among EFL speakers in their conversation. McKay (2002) underlined that intelligibility covers important parts required in a conversation, comprehensibility (capable of understanding the point of a particular utterance) and interpretability (capable of recognizing the implicit meaning of a particular utterance within sociocultural area).

Timmis' (2002) empirical investigation found English teachers' attitude are more positive toward distinctive English accents when they have proper understanding about intelligibility. There will be further discussion about attitude and its urgency for EFL learners.

### **2.3 The importance of having positive language attitudes in EFL instructions**

The attitude is an essential factor able to affect the way people respond to a particular condition since it will be "a summary evaluation of an object of thought" (Bohner & Wänke, 2002, p.5). Therefore, people's behaviour when perceiving a particular condition is more likely the attitudes toward that condition. (Bohner & Wänke, 2002) said attitudes are gained through someone's social encounters and are highly to change through his social interactions. In other words, someone's attitudes, whether positive or negative, perceiving a particular situation are highly affected by external factors (friends, parents, environment and teachers). Also, it is dynamic based on the social interaction.

In the language attitudes context, particular attitudes considering any language are highly likely to be learned and built by social encounters, for instance, via listening to a certain group of speakers (native or non-native speakers), including the aspects of their language, and via encountering language varieties, as well as formal classroom learning activities (Tokumoto, M., & Shibata, 2011). Thus, pedagogical instructions play a vital role to reconstruct EFL learners' attitudes toward English.

With regard to accents, EFL teachers are urgently required to introduce and teach different accents, native and non-native accents, to their students. So, their students will be more open to accept different L1-accented English. In addition, the teachers are supposed to be a role model for their students. If the EFL teachers have positive attitudes toward various L1-accented English, their students have higher tendency to follow their attitudes. Having positive attitudes toward various English accents is extremely crucial in EFL pedagogical context as they "may influence their learning behaviours, including motivation, language practices, and successful attainment of the language" (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011, p. 392)

### **2.4 Studies on people's attitudes perceiving various accents**

Discussing the previous studies investigating EFL students' attitudes toward their mother-tongue accents or English native speakers' accents will be beneficial to deepen our comprehension on how influential EFL learners' attitudes to develop their English skills.



Tokumoto's and Shibata's (2011) study on English learners' attitudes from three different countries (Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan) perceived their own English accents. The study finding indicated native-speakers' accents were considered having higher level than EFL learners' own English accents.

Another study was conducted by (Crismore, Ngeow, & Soo 1996) in Malaysian educational context. The investigation showed Although they were happily communicating with their own accents but they still tried to develop their speaking skills in order to be like British people and Americans in pedagogical and social contexts.

Furthermore, Fraser's (2006) investigation found high school students in Japan admired the accent of Americans and perceived their accent was the most prestigious one compared to the other six accents (British, Scottish, Japanese, Taiwanese, Zimbabwe and Australian). Additionally, the research participants admitted their English accent was intelligibility, but they had negative perception toward their accent and did not aspire to develop it. Similarly, a huge investigation by (Timmis, 2002) found most students perceived the pronunciation of native speaker so positively and they were so motivated to imitate their accents. On the other hand, the teachers were openly accepting different L1-accented English. These two study outcomes clearly show students have high tendency about native-accentedness English as their final goal when learning English. This could happen because they may not be fully aware the idea of intelligibility, so they ignore the essence of conversation, which is comprehensibility, and focus on inessential aspect of a conversation, that is native-speakerness.

Based on the several studies above, it is clear that many ESL/EFL learners have more positive perception toward British and American accents and their learning goal is to replicate their accents. It may happen due to the students' less exposure to intelligibility as the essence of conversation. This native-speakerness fallacy could be affected by pedagogical practices in classroom, [the Internet] and Hollywood movies (Cargile, Takai, & Rodríguez, 2006). That improper perception and attitude is getting worse because McKenzie (2008) claimed community's ideologies, believing the 'correct and proper' accents are the ones spoken by native speakers have high contribution to EFL students' negative attitudes toward their L1-accented English.

## **2.5 Indonesian EFL speakers' attitudes toward different English accents**

The Indonesian government had designed a strategic education policy regarding EFL learning (see comprehensive discussion in the chapter one)

The government policy regarding to EFL education brings strong message for education institutions to develop their teaching performance for better quality EFL instructions. This should include intelligibility as a part of a English classroom instruction. However, there are very few empirical evidences showing how EFL teachers in high schools and higher institutions discussed the intelligibility as a part of their teaching activity. In fact, outside classroom, EFL students are often watching Hollywood movies and listening English songs and watching YouTube channels delivered by native speakers. Those exposure made EFL learners have negative perception toward their own accent (Cargile et al., 2006).

In the Indonesian context, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there was merely one empirical research found so far which was Dharma's & Rudianto's , (2013) MA thesis. Dharma& Rudianto, (2013) investigated 100 University students' attitudes toward different L1 English accents as well as their own English accent. The study found EFL students were aware of the importance of intelligibility in a real English conversation. And, the participants had positive appreciation toward their own English accent. However, they appreciated native accents more positively than non-native accents.

The study outcome above clearly indicated native speaker accent was EFL Indonesian goal in their English learning, particularly in speaking skills.

In Indonesia, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is only one study investigating EFL learners' attitudes toward their own accent and other different accents. This reality encourages the researchers to conduct another investigation on this area. Thus, we can see how Indonesian EFL learners different perceiving their own accent today compared five years ago. Thus, this study can fill the research gap in this topic. More importantly, this study may be used as a reference by EFL teachers to include EIL and intelligibility as a part of their teaching. Consequently, Indonesian EFL learners will tolerate and accept various L1-accented English and positively and happily use their L1-accented English in their international context.

### **3. Methodology**

This section highlights the systematic steps of how the research is planned and conducted so the study aims will be empirically proven.

#### **a. Participant**

There were approximately 45 students from English department of University of Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM) participating in this research. They were at the age of 19 to 22 and at their 5<sup>th</sup> semester. As for the gender ratio, it was 30 females to 15 males. The number of female participants is higher than the male participants as the majority of students are female. All of the participants speak Bahasa Indonesia as their mother tongue. They were randomly selected from 2 classes in the English department. Thus they may have various level of English proficiency. However, it would not affect the research outcome since this research merely investigated the students' attitude, not their English proficiency.

#### **b. Research Instrument**

The questionnaire questions were adapted from Tokumoto and Shibata (2011), which consist of 2 items comprising;

- 1) personal detail: to validate the participants to be included as a part of the data;
- 2) main questions: to gather the information as the main data.

Furthermore, the personal detail section would guarantee the reliability and suitability of the participants involved in this study.

#### **c. Data collection and analysis**

To collect the data, the questionnaire was distributed to each participant at the same time and they were provided 15 minutes to complete all questionnaire questions.

To answer the research question (nativeness or message conveyance as the goal of communication), the data from the questionnaire (in the form a multiple-choice question) were organized. Here the researchers performed a frequency test to obtain the percentage gap between native-likeness and message conveyance. The next step was to categorize the participants' open-ended answers into two groups (native-likeness and message conveyance). As a result, the gap, if it was found, was clearly seen, then it was found whether Indonesian EFL learners prefer to focus on nativeness or meaning when talking using English. So, it would be identifiable their perception toward their L1-accented English, which could be negative or positive.

### **4. Result**

To gain an answer for the research question, data from the participants' answer of the questionnaire was analyzed. There were 36 participants (23 females and 13 males). It was supposed to be 45 participants, but 9 students did not answer the questionnaire, so they were

excluded. Here, they answered a multiple-choice question followed by an essay question (openended question) to justify their answer. The data were, then, analyzed using simple quantitative approach. The quantitative analysis was summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1. *The students' goal of English communication*

Options	EFL learners (N=36)	
	%	N
1. Message conveyance	47.2	17
2. Native-likeness	52.8	19

The finding on the table above clearly shows that more than half of the students focused on being able to talk like a native speaker rather than delivering the message clearly when talking. In other words, the students who prefer the message conveyance is lower compared to the ones who expect to be like a native speaker when having a conversation.

From the essay/ open-ended question, justifying their option (native-likeness or message conveyance), the learners, having less positive attitudes towards their L1-accented English, generally described their reasons in the following table.

Table 2. *The students' goal of communication and their reason*

Option	%	EFL learners (N=36)
		Reason
1.Native-likeness	52.8	1.Having a native accent builds up more confident.
		2.A native accent represents perfect English.
		3. Native accents is easy to understand.
		4.An English speaking role model is the US/ UK.
		5.Native accents help learners to know English more
		6.Native accents represent higher English knowledge

From table 2 above, it is generally identifiable that students consider native accents (British or the US accent) reflect perfect, correct and easy to comprehend English. In addition, if they have an English-native accent, it can boost their confident because English from English native speakers is a role model in speaking. Also, it shows the speakers having higher understanding of English.

Students who focus more on the importance of delivering the message clearly while communication elaborate their reasons in Table 3.

Table 3. *The students' goal of communication and their reason*

Option	%	EFL learners (N=36)
		Reason
1.Message conveyance	47.2	1.Speakers deliver their message clearly. 2.Accents do not affect comprehension. 3.The communication goal is to deliver the message. 4.Verbal and non-verbal languages are more essential in communication. 5.Native-likeness has nothing to do with comprehension. 6. Having our own English accent is acceptable as long as understandable.

The table 3 above generally indicates that native accentedness has nothing to do with comprehension as the goal of communication is to get the message across. In addition, the learners believe verbal and non-verbal language are more important than having a British or the US accent. They confidently say having L1-accented English is fine as long as it is comprehensible for the listeners.

As for the students' goal in communication based on the open-ended questionnaire, it can be summarized that the essence of communication was mutual understanding and having native English accents does not affect intelligibility because the goal of communication is to deliver the message. However, in fact, the number of students who expect to have a native English accent (British or the US) is higher than the ones who focus on delivering the message when using English. Further elaboration about this issue will be highlighted below

## 5. Discussion

Findings above will be highlighted and interpreted in regard to three correlated factors. They are linguistic awareness, English exposure, and the US and British published textbook as English instruction references. For the purpose of English teaching practicality, the pedagogical implication from this research will be discussed.

Analysis outcomes showed they have negative attitudes to appreciate their own L1-accented English. The students said that they did expect to be able to speak English with native speaker accents (British or the US) rather than get their message across when communication. Fraser (2006) found this situation was due to students' low linguistic awareness. Low level of students' linguistic awareness is highly affected by common people's (EFL learners') belief that a native norm, like American accent, is mistakenly considered as the "correct" model of English accent regardless the language comprehension of the different accents, even Indonesian-accented English. Tokumoto & Shibata (2011) underlined this justification is more likely to get affected by language ideology which strongly believe a native accent (American/ British) is a perfect model to acquire when learning English. They continued that the learners' belief is more likely caused by society influence rather than the EFL learners' experience of using the language in real communication. Thus, their justification has nothing to do with the language function whether or not their English accent is acceptable and intelligible for listeners.

In fact, any accent, we have, is not an issue in a communication, but the essence of communication definitely depends on whether our accent is understandable to interlocutor or



not. Besides, the students may be less aware of the SLA theory highlighted that “a native-like accent is impossible unless first exposure is quite early, probably around the age six” (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 158).

The participants were most likely to know that their English accent was certainly accepted understood locally and internationally. But, their pursuit of what they call a native accent strengthens the previous discussion highlighting low understanding of language identity. The students’ L1-accented English represents where they come from and who they belongs. For example, when Singaporeans talk we know even without asking where they come from. Nowadays, accent is globally well-accepted language identity. It means various accents, generated from EIL notion, are warmly welcomed. Thus, there is no longer linguistic hierarchy. As Hamied (2012, p. 273) said there is an acknowledgment of “an equal status for all varieties of English [including accents] both native and non-native. What might occur the students have no this linguistic awareness that L1-accented English represents one’s identity. It causes them to be a native-accentedness centrist. Consequently, the EFL learners devalue their own non-native accent (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011).

Another aspect contributing to the students’ negative attitude is probably caused by the intense and frequent encounters to the Internet and YouTube. Those two play a crucial role to shape their thoughts of English. For instance, they watch English songs, Vlog and English lessons from YouTube or the Internet. YouTubers of those channels are mostly from English speaking countries. This situation eventually build up the EFL learners’ perceptions that English speaking, particularly accent, is proper when it is like a native speaker and they ignore the crucial aspect of communication, delivering the message to the listeners. This improper and superficial comprehension of accent is worsened by a condition where they have fewer encounters with various accents in a real life. For example, they talk with English with Vietnamese, The Chinese and Germany outside the classroom. (Santana-Williamson, 2002) underlined that supplying and familiarizing English students with enough exposure and distinctive English varieties, including accents, can direct them to appreciate various accents more.

Additionally, there is more likely that EFL books for classroom instruction use the ones designed by the US or British book writers. These books are commonly used as the main references for English classroom teaching and learning process. Consequently, most of EFL students take it for granted that intelligibility plays an essential role in English communication. Scale (2006) found instead of intelligibility, acquiring a English native speaker accent was English students’ main objective when learning English. This condition clearly indicates that EFL learners set false goal, in which they prefer to be able to speak like a native not focus on intelligibility in communication.

To sum up, students are fully aware that their English is intelligible in their communication with locals and foreigners, yet they just want to talk like a native in a communication. This condition could be contributed by less linguistic awareness, external factors (such as the Internet, YouTube) and fewer encounters with various English accents. More importantly, English teachers and curriculum designers need to take into consideration to include EIL in classroom instruction, not just encourage the students to master linguistics aspects (vocabulary, grammar, sentences mastery).

## 6. Conclusion

This research investigated Indonesian EFL learners were completely aware their L1 influence when using English, but they are persistent to have native accents (British or American accents) rather than deliver their message clearly in communication. This occurred due to three reasons. First, the learners had improper justification about accentedness.

Secondly, frequent exposure and powerful hegemony of the Internet and YouTube, dominated by native speakers' contents. Lastly, main references for pedagogical instruction are mostly from English speaking countries publishers, strengthen students' belief non-native accents are false ones.

EFL teaching should provide more room to discuss about topics, like EIL and ELF, when EFL teachers deliver materials in class. As a result, the students will confidently use and develop their own accent variety—partly as an identity identification. More importantly, they know that message conveyance is the most crucial aspect in a real conversation.

Furthermore, EFL teachers and curriculum makers are highly encouraged to provide more space (or design a specific course) to talk about intelligibility and pragmatic competence. McKey (2002) emphasized the pragmatic teaching in EIL setting should not ask students to aspire to have a native-like competence. Instead, they can develop linguistic comprehension to let them have good communication with others. This situation boosts their determination in their English learning due to its reachable goal. Thus the students will be more likely to have higher motivation in English learning.

This study result may not be applicable to every EFL instruction because its small number of participants out of a huge population of EFL learners in Indonesia. Therefore, this study is "illustrative rather than generalisable" (Hall & Cook, 2015). However, nevertheless, this study outcome is more likely to be implemented in a particular EFL pedagogical setting through some adjustment, such as students' needs and competence, classroom facilities and other related aspects.

To conclude, this research probably have limitations and its findings (EFL learners' less positive attitude towards their L1-accented English and native-likeness as their goal of English communication) are not so surprising due to limited exposure to various English accents and abundant YouTube created by native speakers. However, these findings are positively essential to encourage EFL teachers to accommodate intelligibility, pragmatic competence and EIL as part of the classroom instruction. As a result, the EFL students are going to meet the expected awareness in which English communication globally does not take into account whether the speakers are native or nonnative, instead, they just want to have a smooth and meaningful communication.

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**Questionnaire**  
**English Education Department**  
**Section 1**

**Personal details**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: male female
3. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years old
4. Semester: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Duration of learning English: \_\_\_\_\_ years

**Section 2**

1. What are your criteria to determine someone is native speaker or not? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Which one is more critical when speaking English?  
a) Native-likeness      b) Message conveyance  
Justify your choice! \_\_\_\_\_





# Prosiding

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